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OF
Mr. Y O R I C K.

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Description of the World.

2 PETER, iii. 11.

Seeing then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? looking and hastening unto the coming of God.

THE subject upon which St. Peter is discoursing in this chapter, is the certainty of Christ's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the representation he gives of it,—in which, in answer to the cavils of the scoffers

in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming,—he tells them, that God is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to us ward;—*that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.*—Seeing then, says he, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—The inference is unavoidable,—at least in theory, however it fails in practice;—how widely these two differ, I intend to make the subject of this



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discourse; and though it is a melancholy comparison, to consider, ‘ what manner of persons we *really* are,’ with ‘ what manner of persons we *ought* to be;’ yet as the knowledge of the one, is at least one step towards the improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its use.

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recal to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle’s argument, and from a brief representation of the Christian religion, and the obligations it lays upon us, shew,

what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world will, I fear, be able to discern but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.—Of all the ends and pursuits we are looking for, and hastening unto,—this would be the least suspected,—for without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle which the apostle lays stress on, and as little sense of religion,—as small a share of virtue (at least as

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little of the appearance of it) as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—The degeneracy of the times has been the common complaint of many ages:—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth the hearts.—

But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they studied at least to preserve the appearance of virtue;—public vice was branded with public infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The service of God was regularly attended, and religion not exposed to the reproaches of the scorner.

How the case stands with us at present in each of these particulars,

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it is grievous to report, and perhaps unacceptable to Religion herself; yet as this is a season wherein it is fit we should be told of our faults, let us for a moment impartially consider the articles of this charge.

And first, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at present upon the lives and behaviour of the present times;—concerning which I have said, that if we are to trust appearances, there is as little as can well be supposed to exist at all in a Christian country.—Here I shall spare exclamations, and avoiding all common-place railing upon the subject, confine myself to facts, such as every one who looks

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out into the world, and makes any observations at all, will vouch for me.

Now whatever are the degrees of real religion amongst us,—whatever they are, the appearances are strong against the charitable side of the question.—

If religion is any where to be found, one would think it would be amongst those of the higher rank in life, whose education and opportunities of knowing its great importance, should have brought them over to its interest, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent in its example.—But if you examine the fact, you will almost find it a test of a politer education and mark of

more shining parts, to know nothing, and indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or if the subject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more sprightly wits,—that it serves no other purpose, but that of being made merry at, and of being reserved, as a standing jest to enliven discourse, when conversation sickens upon their hands.—

This is too fore an evil not to be observed amongst persons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and so early does the contempt of this great concern begin to shew itself—that it is no uncommon thing to hear persons disputing against religion, and raising cavils against the Bible, at an age when some of them would be hard

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set to read a chapter in it.—And I may add, that of those whose stock in knowledge is somewhat larger, for the most part it has scarce any other foundation to rest on but the sinking credit of traditional and second-hand objections against revelation, which had they leisure to read, they would find answered and confuted a thousand times over.—But this by the way.—

If we take a view of the public worship of Almighty God, and observe in what manner it is revered by persons in this rank of life, whose duty it is to set an example to the poor and ignorant, we shall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonstration of

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a sense of our duty towards God, as if religion was a business fit only to employ tradesmen and mechanics—and the salvation of our souls, a concern utterly below the consideration of a person of figure and consequence.—

I shall say nothing at present of the lower ranks of mankind—though they have not yet got into the fashion of laughing at religion, and treating it with scorn and contempt, and I believe are too serious a set of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt it is held in by those whose examples they are too apt to imitate, will in time utterly shake their principles, and render them, if not as prophane, at least as corrupt as their betters.—

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When this event happens—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, those who have done the mischief will find the necessity at the last of turning religious in their own defence, and for want of a better principle, to set an example of piety and good morals for their own interest and convenience.—

Thus much for the languishing state of religion in the present age;—in virtue and good morals perhaps the account may stand higher.—

Let us inquire——

And here, I acknowledge, that an unexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unani-

mous we were all in our cry against vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it—and that there was so general a horror and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence than hear-say—let us see in the present how the one case is contradicted by the other.—

However vehement we approve ourselves in discourse against vice—I believe no one is ignorant that the re-

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ception it actually meets with is very different—the conduct and behaviour of the world is so opposite to their language, and all we hear so contradicted by what we see, as to leave little room to question which sense we are to trust.—

Look, I beseech you, among those whose higher stations are made a shelter for the liberties they take, you will see, that no man's character is so infamous, nor any woman's so abandoned, as not to be visited and admitted freely into all companies, and, if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, caressed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a short view of the general decay of it, from

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the fashionable excesses of the age,—
in favour of which there seems to
be formed so strong a party, that a
man of sobriety, temperance, and
regularity, scarce knows how to ac-
commodate himself to the society he
lives in,—and is oft as much at a loss
how and where to dispose of him-
self;—and unless you suppose a mix-
ture of constancy in his temper, it
is great odds but such a one would
be ridiculed, and laughed out of his
scruples and his virtue at the same
time;—to say nothing of occasional
rioting, chambering, and wanton-
ness.—Consider how many public
markets are established merely for the
sale of virtue,—where the manner of
going, too sadly indicates the inten-

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tion;—and the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

This sinning under disguise, I own, seems to carry some appearance of a secret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as such, was it not the only public instance the world seems to give of it. In other cases, a just sense of shame seems a matter of so little concern, that instead of any regularity of behaviour, you see thousands who are tired with the very form of it, and who at length have even thrown the mask of it aside, as a useless piece of incumbrance.—This I believe will need no evidence, it is too evidently

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seen in the open liberties taken every day in defiance (not to say of religion) but of decency and common good manners;—so that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices, which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly shew their face in broad day, and oft times with such an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himself honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a state of guilt, was as necessary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.—

If we pass on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is

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a softer name for vices) you will scarce see any thing, in what is called higher life, but what bespeaks a general relaxation of all order and discipline, in which our opinions as well as manners seem to be set loose from all restraints;—and, in truth, from all serious reflections too:—and one may venture to say, that gaming and extravagance, to the utter ruin of the greatest estates,—minds dissipated with diversions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the most general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at least the more solemn seasons of the year, set apart for the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, should give some check and

interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongst us, that it is so;—what one alteration does it make in the course of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification insulted by the same luxury of entertainments at our tables;—is not the same order of diversions perpetually returning, and scarce any thing else thought of?—does not the same levity in dress, as well as discourse, shew itself in persons of all ages? I say of all ages; for it is no small aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which by its authority was once able to frown youth into sobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, seems but too often to lead the way,—and

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By their unseasonable example give a countenance to follies and weakness, which youth is but too apt to run into without such a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, should have nothing about it, but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the case,—but now,—grey hairs themselves scarce ever appear, but in the high mode and flanting garb of youth,—with heads as full of pleasure, and clothes as ridiculously, and as much in the fashion, as the person who wears them is usually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a short reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldest equal the youngest

in the vanity of their dress, there is no reason to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not surpass them, in the vanity of their desires.—

But this by the bye.—

Though in truth the observation falls in with the main intention of this discourse,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light hand, but plainly to point them out; that by recalling to your mind, what manner of persons we really are, I might better lead you to the apostle's inference, of what manner of persons ye ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.—

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The apostle, in the concluding verse of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for such things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the reason or the passions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it must be from the force and influence of this awakening consideration in the text:—"That all these things shall be dissolved,"—that this vain and perishable scene must change, that we who now tread the stage, must shortly be summoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, hastening unto the place from whence we shall return no more;—

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that whilst we are here,—our conduct and behaviour is minutely observed;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whose omniscient eye spies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the passages of our lives;—that these volumes shall be produced and opened, and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them;—that without respect of persons, we shall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words, and actions to this greatest and best of Beings, before whose judgment-seat we must finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good, or whether they are bad, —

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That to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night;—of that hour no one knoweth;—that we are not sure of its being suspended one day or one hour; or, what is the same case,—that we are standing upon the edge of a precipice, with nothing but the single thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtless state, we are lost, and must perish for evermore.—

What manner of persons we ought to be, upon these principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy conversation and godliness;—and I shall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looking

for, and hastening unto the coming of God, under such a life, is, from that of spending our days in vanity, and our years in pleasure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude in that merciful warning, which our Saviour, the judge himself hath given us, at the close of the same exhortation.—

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be over-charged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life;—and so that day come upon you unawares:—for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.— Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to

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escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Which may God of his mercy grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

escape all these things that shall come
to pass, and to stand before the Son
of man. Which may God of his
mercy grant through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

SERMON XVI.

ST. PETER'S Character.

Acts, iii. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

THESE words, as the text tells us, were spoke by St. Peter, on the occasion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and, in the beginning of this chapter, had asked an

alms of St. Peter and St. John, as they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter fastening his eyes, as in the 4th verse, and declaring he had no such relief to give him as he expected, having neither silver nor gold,—but that such as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Master, he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to rise up and walk.—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength; and he leaped up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praising God.—

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It seems he had been born lame; had passed a whole life of despair, without hopes of ever being restored;—so that the immediate sense of strength and activity communicated to him at once, in so surprising and unsought-for a manner, cast him into the transport of mind natural to a man so benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing instance of a supernatural power;—the notoriety of fact, wrought at the hour of prayer;—the unexceptionableness of the object,—that it was no imposture,—for they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple;—the unfeigned expressions of an enraptured heart almost beside itself, confirming the whole;—

the man that was healed, in the 16th verse, holding his benefactors, Peter and John, entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God;—the great concourse of people, drawn together by this event in the 11th verse, for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Sure never was such a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have established a character of superior goodness and power.—To a man set upon this world, who sought his own praise and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned these circumstances to such a purpose;—to have fallen in with the passions of an astonished and grateful

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city, preposseſſed, from what had happened, ſo ſtrongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requiſite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the higheſt reverence of his ſanctity, awe of his perſon, or whatever other belief ſhould be neceſſary to feed his pride, or ſerve ſecret ends of glory and intereſt.—A mind not ſufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God—and transferred it to himſelf.—He might—not ſo—a diſciple of Chriſt: for when Peter ſaw it, —when he ſaw the propenſity in them to be miſled on this occaſion,—he answered and ſaid unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of

Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look you so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?—the GOD of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the GOD of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus. —

O holy, and blessed apostle!

How would thy meek and mortified spirit satisfy itself in uttering so humble and so just a declaration?—What an honest triumph wouldst thou taste the sweets of,—in thus conquering thy passion of vain glory,—keeping down thy pride,—disclaiming the praises which should have fed it, by telling the wondering spectators, It was not thy own power,—it

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was not thy own holiness, which had wrought this,—thou being of like passions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holiness of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who wast but an instrument in his hands.—If thus honestly declining honour, which the occasion so amply invited thee to take;—if this would give more satisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudest praises of a mistaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection,—that in this instance of self-denial—thou hadst not only done well,—but, what was still a more endearing thought, that thou hadst been able to copy the example

of thy divine Master, who, in no action of his life, sought ever his own praise, but, on the contrary, declined all possible occasions of it;—and in the only public instance of honour which he suffered to be given him in his entrance into Jerusalem,—thou didst remember,—it was accepted with such a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hosannas of the multitude, than in the meekness wherewith he received them, lowly and sitting upon an ass.—How could a disciple fail of profiting by the example of so humble a master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every instance of it, shewed plainly he came

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not to share the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accomplished, by engrossing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world; and by the splendour of his court, and dignity of his person, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applause and admiration of the world?—this every disciple knew was in his power;—so that the meanness of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was engaged, by preaching the gospel to the poor—the numberless dangers and inconveniencies attending the execution,—were all vo-

luntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meanest of the people,—amongst whom he appeared rather as a servant than a master, coming not, as he often told them, to be ministered unto, but to minister,—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him, having no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that we should desire him.—

How could a disciple, you'll say, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would suggest had happened of a piece with it, in the course of his master's life;—but particularly at the conclusion and great

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catastrophe of it,—at his crucifixion; the impressions of which could never be forgotten?—When a life full of so many engaging instances of humility, was crowned with the most endearing one of humbling himself to the death of the cross,—the death of a slave and a malefactor,—suffering himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter,—dragged to Calvary without opposition or complaint, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O blessed Jesus! well might a disciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhortedst them all, for thou wast meek and lowly:—well might they profit,

when such a lesson was seconded by such an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this must have had on the actions of those who were attendants and constant followers of our Saviour on earth;—saw the meekness of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his rescue, or by a single act of omnipotence to have destroyed his enemies; yet suppressed his almighty power,—neither repented—or revenged the indignity done him, but patiently suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors.—

It could not well be otherwise, but that every eye-witness of this

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must have been wrought upon, in some degree, as the apostle, to let the same mind be in him which also was in Christ Jesus. Nor will it be disputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the present transaction might be owing to the impressions he received, on that memorable occasion of his Lord's death, sinking still deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many instances his master had given of this engaging virtue in the course of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and sensible nature, as we may collect from the sacred writings,—a temper fittest to receive all the advantages which such impressions could

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give;—and therefore, as it is a day and place sacred to this great apostle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time, in a short essay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular disposition of heart, which is the subject of the discourse.—

This great apostle was a man of distinction amongst the disciples,—and was one of such virtues and qualifications, as seemed to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

On his first admission to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a most evident testimony that he was a man of real and tender goodness, when

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being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fishes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author must necessarily be from God, he fell down instantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection;—Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!—The censure, you will say, expresses him a sinful man;—but so to censure himself,—with such unaffected modesty, implies more effectually than any thing else could,—that he was not, in the common sense of the word,—a sinful, but a good man, who, like the publican in the temple, was no less justified, for a self-accusation extorted merely from the humility of a devout heart jealous of its own im-

perfections.—And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear,—yet he who heard them, and knew the heart of the speaker, found they carried in them a great measure of desire.—For Peter was not willing to be discharged from his new guest, but fearing his unfitness to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his conversation.—A meek and modest distrust of himself, seemed to have had no small share, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved, and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and

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master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—An instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples feet; to which office, not one of them is represented as making any opposition: But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him,—Dost *Thou* wash my feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter—Peter said to him,—Thou shalt never wash my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his submission,—and he expos-

tulates with him upon it, with all the earnest and tender opposition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with shame, that his Lord and master should insist to do so mean and painful an act of servitude to him.—

I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life, as these, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard;—has more preparation to disguise the true disposition of his heart,—and more temptation when disguised to impose it on others.—

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the

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real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation;—though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him to the sharpness of a rebuke where he could least bear it.—

I take notice of this, because it will help us in some measure to reconcile a seeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from considering that great

and capital failing of his life, when by a presumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the disgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted so opposite to the character here given, that you will ask,—How could so humble a man as you describe ever have been guilty of so self-sufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he should die with his Master,—yet would he not deny him?—Or whence,—that so sincere and honest a man was not better able to perform it?—

The case was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occasion to admonish his disciples of the peril of lapsing,—tell-

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ing them, 31st verse,—All ye shall be offended because of me this night.—To which Peter answering, with a zeal mixed with too much confidence,—That though all should be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check his trust in himself,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular should deny him *thrice*.—But Peter looking upon this monition no farther than as it implied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage;—stung to the heart to have them called in question by his Lord,—he hastily summons them all up to form his final resolution,—Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.—The resolve was noble and dutiful to the last de-

gree,—and I make no doubt as honest a one—that is, both as just in the matter, and as sincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not suffering us to imagine he made it in a braving dissimulation:—no;—for he proved himself sufficiently in earnest by his subsequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his sword against a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had less concern for his own life, than he had for his master's safety.—How then came his resolution to miscarry?—The reason seems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himself,—doubted not but his will was

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In his power, whether God's grace assisted him or not ;—surely thinking, that what he had courage to resolve so honestly, he had likewise ability to perform.—This was his mistake,—and though it was a very great one,—yet it was in some degree akin to a virtue,—as it sprung merely from a consciousness of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a conclusion of what they would enable him to perform, on the sharpest encounters for his Master's sake :—so that his failing in this point, was but a consequence of this hasty and ill-considered resolve ;—and his Lord, to rebuke and punish him for it, did no other than leave him to his own strength to perform it ;—which, in

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effect, was almost the same as leaving him to the necessity of not performing it at all.—The great apostle had not considered, that he who cautioned him was the searcher of hearts,—and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man:—he did not remember, that his Lord had said before,—Without me ye can do nothing;—that the exertions of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture,—where he had so great a temptation to the contrary,—though he was full of the persuasion in every other transaction of his life,—but most visibly here in the

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text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart still overflowing with remembrance of this very mistake he had once committed;—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holiness we had wrought this?—The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,—the God of our fathers, through faith in his name hath made this man whole, whom ye see and know.—

This is the best answer I am able to make to this objection against the uniformity of the apostle's character which I have given:—upon which let it be added,—that was no such apology capable of being made in its behalf;—that the truth and regu-

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larity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it:—the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities: and were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man,—the failings and imperfections of a religious man,—the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man;—were they to rise up in judgment against them,—and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss,—what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him?—So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a

SERMON XVI. 53

man may claim when he falls, through surprise more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to sum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man sensible in his nature,—of quick passions, tempered with the greatest humility and most unaffected poverty of spirit that ever met in such a character.—So that in the only criminal instance of his life, which I have spoke to, you are at a loss which to admire most ;—the tenderness and sensibility of his soul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jesus ;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he testified thereupon, in the bitterness of his sorrow for what he had done.—He was once presumptuous in trusting to

his own strength; his general and true character was that of the most engaging meekness,—distrustful of himself and his abilities to the last degree.—

He denied his master—But in all instances of his life, but that, was a man of the greatest truth and sincerity;—to which part of his character our Saviour has given an undeniable testimony, in conferring on him the symbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the most expressive of constancy and firmness.—

He was a man of great love to his master,—and of no less zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I shall take one instance out of St. John, with which I shall conclude this

SERMON XVI. 55

account.—Where, upon the desertion of several other disciples,—our Saviour puts the question to the twelve,—Will ye also go away?—Then, says the text, Peter answered and said,—Lord! whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,—and we believe, and know that thou art Christ the son of God.—Now, if we look into the gospel, we find what our Saviour pronounced on this very confession.

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my Father which is in heaven.—That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reason; because reason was able to

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judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy God, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happiness. —But for all this,—reason could not infallibly determine that the messenger of this doctrine was the Messias, the eternal Son of the living God:—to know this required an illumination;—and this illumination, I say, seems to have been vouchsafed at that instant as a reward,—as would have been sufficient evidence by itself of the disposition of his heart.—

I have now finished this short essay upon the character of St. Peter, not with a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon some monastic qualifications,

SERMON XVI. 57

with which a popish pulpit would ring upon such an occasion, without doing much honour to the saint, or good to the audience;—but have drawn it with truth and sobriety, representing it as it was, as consisting of virtues the most worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dresses out her saints on these days,—but upon matters of fact in the sacred Scriptures, in which all Christians agree.—And since I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by observing, how ill the spirit and character of that church resembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the sub-

ject of this discourse.—Would one think that a church, which thrusts itself under this apostle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would presume to exceed the degrees of it which he acknowledged to possess himself?—But how ill are your expectations answered, when instead of the humble declaration in the text, —Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us, as if our own power and holiness had wrought this;—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romish court, as opposite to it as insolent words and actions can frame!—

So that instead of, Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us,—Ye men of Israel, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:—Approach our sacred pontiff,

SERMON XVI. 59

—(who is not only holy—but holiness itself)—approach his person with reverence, and deem it the greatest honour and happiness of your lives to fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiss his feet.—

Think not, as if it were not our own holiness which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holiness,—the superabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourselves,—from works of supererogation, we have transferred the surplus in ecclesiastic warehouses, and in pure zeal for the good of your souls, have established public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times,—

60 SERMON XVI.

Think not, ye men of Israel, or say within yourselves, that we are unprofitable servants;—we have no good works to spare, or that if we had,—we cannot make this use of them;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgences,—and huckster them out, as we do, through all the parts of Christendom.—Know ye by these presents, that it is our own power which does this;—the plenitude of our apostolick power operating with our own holiness, that enables us to bind and loose, as seems meet to us on earth;—to save your souls or deliver them up to Satan, and as they please or displease, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate

SERMON XVI. 61

them all;—binding kings in chains,
and your nobles in links of iron.—

That we may never again feel the
effects of such language and prin-
ciples,—may God of his mercy grant
us. Amen.

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SERMON XVII.

Thirtieth of January.

EZRA, ix. 6, 7.

*And I said, O my God, I am ashamed
and blush to lift up my face to thee,
my God:—for our iniquities are in-
creased over our head, and our tres-
pass is grown up unto the heavens.—
Since the days of our fathers have
we been in a great trespass unto this
day.—*

THERE is not, I believe,
throughout all history, an in-
stance of so strange and obstinately
corrupt a people, as the Jews, of whom
Ezra complains;—for though, on one

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hand,—there never was a people that received so many testimonies of God's favour to encourage them to be good,—so, on the other hand, there never was a people which so often felt the scourge of their iniquities to dishearten them from doing evil.—

And yet neither the one or the other seemed ever able to make them either the wiser or better;—neither God's blessings, nor his corrections could ever soften them;—they still continued a thankless, unthinking people,—who profited by no lessons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with punishments,—but on every succeeding trials and occasions, extremely disposed against God, to go astray and act wickedly.

SERMON XVII. 65

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with sorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character;—and the manner of his application to God, is so expressive of his humble sense of it;—and there is something in the words so full of tenderness and shame for them upon that score—as bespeaks the most paternal, as well as pastoral concern for them.—And he said,—O my God, I am ashamed,—and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.—No doubt, the holy man was confounded to look back upon that long series of so many of God's undeserved mercies to them, of which they had made so bad and ungrateful a use:—he considered, that they had

66 SERMON XVII.

all the motives that could lay restraints either upon a considerate or a reasonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition,—he had heard their cry and took compassion upon their afflictions, and by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had set them free from the yoke of oppression.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the same time, that besides this instance of God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape,—a series of successes, not to be ac-

SERMON XVII. 67

counted for from second causes, and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of GóD's general concern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people: in the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he suffered no man to do them wrong,—but re- proved even kings for their sake;—that when they entered into the promised land, no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession,—no army was ever able to drive them out;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were thrust forth from before them;—that, in a

word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of God, to serve them, and that even the sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories;—that when all these mercies were cast away upon them, and no principle of gratitude or interest could make them an obedient people,—God had tried by misfortunes to bring them back;—that when instructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets, and holy guides had no effect,—he at last suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall again into the same state of bondage in Babylon, from whence he had first raised them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confession,—

SERMON XVII. 69

It was no small aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this last trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promises and threats, comforts and afflictions, instead of making them grow the better,—made them apparently grow the worse:—how could he intercede for them, but with shame and sorrow;—and say, as in the text,—O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee,—for our iniquities are increased over our heads,—and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens;—since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day.—

Thus much for the prophet's humble confession to God for the Jews,

70 SERMON XVII.

for which he had but too just a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better use of the words, as the occasion of the day led me to the choice of them,—than by a serious application of the same sad confession, in regard to ourselves.—

Our fathers, like those of the Jews in Ezra's time,—no doubt have done amiss, and greatly provoked God by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increased over our heads;—if since the days of our fathers we have been in great trespasses ourselves unto this day,—'tis fit this day we should be put in mind of it;—nor can the time and occasion be better employed, than in hearing with

SERMON XVII. 71

patience the reproofs which such a parallel will lead me to give.—

It must be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had;—yet, at the same time, there is no one which has not sufficient (and setting aside at present the consideration of a future state as a reward for being so)—there is no nation under heaven, which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, but have received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay:—there has been a time, may be, when they have been de-

livered from some grievous calamity, —from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries, and plots, and designs against the well-being of their states,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink;—by some signal interposition of God's providence;—they may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—

If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—insomuch that our history, for this last century, has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances, and God's blessings,—and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption,—as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language besides,—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which must have wrought them for us.—Here then let us stop and look back a moment, and

inquire, as in the case of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received?

A stranger,—when he heard—that this island had been so favoured by heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—so blessed in our situation and natural product,—and in all of them so often,—so visibly protected by providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our blessings;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured,—that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth.

SERMON XVII. 75

Would to God! there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief;—for without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this respect as little as it was possible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue,—and as little sense of religion, at least as little of the appearance of it, as can be supposed to exist at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were possessed of,—God, who searcheth the heart,—best knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at least—the form of godliness,

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and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at least the appearance and outward garb of it—The public service of God was better frequented,—and in a devout, as well as regular manner;—there was no open profaneness in our streets to put piety to the blush,—or domestic ridicule, to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.—

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect;—the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint;—good orders and good hours were then kept up in most families; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions;—so

SERMON XVII. 77

that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.—

But all this has insensibly been borne down, ever since the days of our forefathers trespass;—when, to avoid one extreme, we began to run into another;—so that instead of any great religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the mask of it aside,—as an useless incumbrance.—

But this licentiousness, he would say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has since this tried you with afflictions;—you

78 SERMON XVII.

have been visited with a long and expensive war:—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold,—and left no herd in the stalls. —Surely he'll say,—two such terrible scourges must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land—from such admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteousness for themselves. —

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope should always be the natural use and improvement from such calamities;—for we often find that numbers who, in prosperity, seem to forget God, do yet remember

SERMON XVII. 79

him in the day of trouble and distress.—Yet consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it in fact, as one would be led to expect from the speculation:—for instance,—with all the devastation, bloodshed, and expence which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made to frugality,—to virtue, or even to seriousness itself?—The pestilence amongst our cattle,—though it has distressed and utterly undone so many thousands, yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?—

And though one would imagine that the necessary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loss of rents and property from the other, should in

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some measure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions, as we have done ;—yet what appearance is there amongst us, that it is so ?—

What one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it ? —Is not there the same luxury and epicurism of entertainments at our tables ?—do we not pursue with eagerness the same giddy round of trifling diversions ?—is not the infection diffused amongst people of all ranks, and all ages ?—And even grey hairs, whose sober example and manners ought to check the extravagant follies of the thoughtless, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the same costly ornaments, and

SERMON XVII. 81

join the general riot. Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even charity will allow us to suppose, that a consciousness of their inability to pursue greater excesses, is the only vexation of spirit.—In truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of the discourse,—which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and shew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion;—which all men see,—and which the wise and good so much lament.—

But the inquirer will naturally go on and say, that though this representation does not answer his expectations, that undoubtedly we must have profited by these lessons in

82 SERMON XVII.

other respects;—that though we have not approved our understanding in the sight of God, by a virtuous use of our misfortunes, to true wisdom;—that we must have improved them, however, to political wisdom;—so that he would say,—though the English do not appear to be a religious people,—they are at least a loyal one:—They have so often felt the scourge of rebellion, and have tasted so much sharp fruit from it,—as to have set their teeth on edge forever.—But, good God! how would he be astonished to find,—that though we have been so often tost to and fro by our own tempestuous humours,—that we were not yet sick of the storm; that though we so-

SERMON XVII. 83

lemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in staining their hands in blood,—we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the same way:—and though the providence of God has set bounds, that they do not work as much mischief,—as in days of distraction and desolation,—little reason have we to ascribe the merit thereof to our own wisdom;—so that, when the whole account is stated betwixt us,—there seems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text;—that our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heaven.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a

84 SERMON XVII.

great trespass unto this day ;—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—’tis much more so, that we weep for ourselves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chastisements of God,—or from the sins and provocations of our forefathers.—

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of such humiliation ;—and unless it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the service of this day is more a senseless insult upon the memories of our ancestors,—than an honest design to profit by their mistakes and misfortunes,—and to become wiser and

SERMON XVII. 85

better from our reflections upon them.—

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God, not to lay their sins to our charge,—whilst we have so many remaining of our own.—Unless we are touched for ourselves, how can we expect he should hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel;—this is the very state we are in,—which, by disengaging providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people exposed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however statesmen may

dispute about the causes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cause, a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to God,—that they are consequently, the only true basis of our happiness and prosperity on earth.—And however we may shelter ourselves under distinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worst enemy the state has ;—and for the contrary, it will always be found, that a virtuous man is the best patriot, and the best subject the king has.—And though an individual may say, what will my righteousness profit a nation of men?—I answer,—if it fail of a blessing here (which is

SERMON XVII. 87.

not likely), it will have one advantage,—it will save thy own soul, and give thee that peace at the last, which this world cannot take away.—

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant us all. Amen.

HERMON XVIII.

and (likely) it will have one more
case. It will have the own feel,
and give that that peace at the last,
which this world cannot take away —
Which God, of his infinite mercy,
grant us all. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

ROMANS, ii. 4.

*Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodneſs,
and forbearance, and long-ſuffering,—
knowing that the goodneſs of God
leadeth thee to repentance?*

So ſays St. Paul. And,

ECCLESIASTES, viii. 11.

*Be cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work
is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the
heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in
them to do evil.—*

TAKE either as you like it, you
will get nothing by the bar-
gain.—

'Tis a terrible character of the world,
which Solomon is here accounting

SERMON XVII.

not likely, it will have one advantage
it will have its own loss
and give thee that peace at the last
which this world cannot take away.
O Lord God, of his infinite goodness,
grant us this.

SERMON XVIII.

ROMANS, ii. 4.

*Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodneſs,
and forbearance, and long-ſuffering,—
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TAKE either as you like it, you
will get nothing by the bar-
gain.—

'Tis a terrible character of the world,
which Solomon is here accounting

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for,—that their hearts were fully set in them to do evil.—And the general outcry against the wickedness of the age, in every age, from Solomon's down to this, shews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.—

The disorder and confusion arising in the affairs of the world from the wickedness of it, being ever such,—so evidently seen,—so severely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a spectator or a sufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times he lived in; as if the corruptions of men's manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almost of rising above the pitch to which the wickedness of the

SERMON XVIII. 91

age was arrived.—How far they may have been deceived in such calculations, I shall not inquire;—let it suffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—considering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, instead of declaiming against it, let us see whether a discourse may not be as serviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their first principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.—

Let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon christians,—ought not in reason to reflect

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dishonour upon christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good,—that there is not a greater paradox in nature,—than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.—Though this may seem a paradox,—’tis still, I say, no objection, though it has often been made use of against christianity;—since, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation, but ’tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason,—before revelation was given.—For setting aside the obligations which a divine law lays upon us,—whoever considers the state and condition of human nature, and upon this view,

SERMON XVIII. 93

how much stronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is or ever has been.—For who would suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act against the common interest of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong?—But on the other side,—if men first look into the practice of the world, and there observe the strange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all discourses of virtue and honesty were mere matter of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with;—and say truly, that

94 SERMON XVIII.

men seemed universally to be agreed in nothing but in speaking well and doing ill.—But this casts no more dishonour upon reason, than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the case being this,—that no motives have been great enough to restrain those from sin who have secretly loved it, and only sought pretences for the practice of it.—So that if the light of the gospel has not left a sufficient provision against the wickedness of the world,—the true answer is, that there can be none.—'Tis sufficient that the excellency of christianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a strong evidence of its divine original,—and these advantages

SERMON XVIII. 95

it has above any institution that ever was in the world :—it gives the best directions,—the best examples,—the greatest encouragements,—the best helps, and the greatest obligation to gratitude.—But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural necessity,—but by moral persuasion,—which sets good and evil before them;—so that, if men have power to do evil, or chuse the good, and will abuse it, this cannot be avoided.—Not only religion, but even reason itself, must necessarily imply a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world, which have it, were created free to stand, or free to fall :—and therefore men that will not be wrought upon by this way of address, must expect, and

96 SERMON XVIII.

be contented, to feel the stroke of that rod which is prepared for the back of fools, oft times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.—

Because this sentence is not always executed speedily, is the wise man's account of the general licentiousness which prevailed through the race of mankind,—so early as his days : and we may allow it a place, amongst the many other fatal causes of depravation in our own ;—a few of which, I shall beg leave to add to this explication of the wise man's ; subjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.—

SERMON XVIII. 97

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.—

It seems somewhat hard to understand the consequence, why men should grow more desperately wicked,—because God is merciful and gives them space to repent;—this is no natural effect,—nor does the wise man intend to insinuate that the goodness and long-suffering of God, is the cause of the wickedness of man, by a direct efficacy to harden sinners in their course.—But the scope of his discourse is this, Because a vicious man escapes at present, he

is apt to draw false conclusions from it, and from the delay of God's punishment in this life, either to conceive them at so remote a distance, or perhaps so uncertain, that though he has some doubtful misgivings of the future, yet he hopes in the main, that his fears are greater than his danger;—and from observing some of the worst of men both live and die, without any outward testimony of God's wrath,—draws from thence some flattering ground of encouragement for himself, and with the wicked in the psalm, says in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me:—as if it was necessary, if God is to punish at all, that he

SERMON XVIII. 99

must do it presently;—which by the way would rather seem to bespeak rage and fury of an incensed party, than the determination of a wise and patient judge,—who respites punishment to another state, declaring for the wisest reasons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but that he has appointed a day for it, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and make such unalterable distinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his justice.—

That mankind have ever made an ill use of this forbearance, is, and I fear will ever be the case:—and St. Peter, in his description of the scof-

100 SERMON XVIII.

fers in the latter days, who, he tells us, shall walk after their own lusts (the worst of all characters), he gives the same sad solution of what should be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would say,—Where is the promise [where is the threatening, or declaration of, ἡ ἐπαγγελία] of his coming,—for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—that is, the world goes on in the same uninterrupted course, where all things fall alike to all, without any interposition from above—or any outward token of divine displeasure:—upon this ground, “Come ye,” say they, as the prophet represents them, “I will fetch wine,

SERMON XVIII. 101

and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."—

Now if you consider, you will find, that all this false way of reasoning doth arise from that gross piece of self-flattery, that such do imagine God to be like themselves,—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are,—and they presently think, if a fellow-creature offended them at the rate that sinners are said to offend God, and they had as much power in their hands to punish and torture them as he has, they would be sure to execute it speedily;—but because they see God does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of God's anger against vice, and his

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future punishment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the terror of old women and children.—Thus speak they peace to their souls, when there is no peace;—for though a sinner—(which the wise man adds by way of caution after the text) for though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet sure I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God,—but shall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the psalmist, speaking in the name of God,—uses this remonstrance to one under this fatal mistake which has misled thousands;—these things thou didst, and I kept silence:—And it seems this silence was interpreted

SERMON XVIII. 103

into consent ;—for it follows,—and thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself ;—but the psalmist adds, how ill he took this at men's hands, and that they should not know the difference between the forbearance of sinners,—and his neglect of their sins ;—but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee.— Upon the whole of which, he bids them be better advised, and consider, lest, while they forget God, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.—

Thus much for the first ground and cause which the text gives, why the hearts of the sons of men are so fully set in them to do evil ;—upon which I have only one or two cau-

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tions to add,—That, in the first place, we frequently deceive ourselves in the calculation that sentence shall not be speedily executed.—By sad experience, vicious and debauched men find this matter to turn out very different in practice, from their expectations in theory; God having so contrived the nature of things throughout the whole system of moral duties;—that every vice, in some measure should immediately revenge itself upon the doer;—that falsehood, and unfair dealing, ends in distrust and dishonour;—that drunkenness and debauchery, should weaken the thread of life, and cut it so short, that the transgressor shall not live out half his days;—that pride should be

SERMON XVIII. 105

followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and distress;—that the revengeful and malicious should be the greatest tormentor of himself,—the perpetual disturbance of his own mind being so immediate a chastisement, as to verify what the wise man says upon it,—That as the merciful man does good to his own soul, so he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

In all which cases there is a punishment independent of these, and that is the punishment which a man's own mind takes upon itself, from the remorse of doing what is wrong — *Prima est hæc ultio*,—this is the first revenge which (whatever other punishments he may escape) is sure to

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follow close upon his heels, and haunts him wheresoever he goes;—for whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poison, which, though it may work slowly, will work surely, and give him perpetual pains and heart-aches,—and if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.—So that, notwithstanding that final sentence of God is not executed speedily in exact weight and measure,—there is nevertheless a sentence executed, which a man's own conscience pronounces against him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a process within his own breast commenced against himself, and finds himself as much accused, and as evidently and

SERMON XVIII. 107

impartially condemned for what he has done amiss, as if he had received sentence before the most awful tribunal ;—which judgment of conscience, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable sentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions—I cannot conceive the state of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulness described by the prophet,—That the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and filth.

A second caution against this uniform ground of false hope, in sen-

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tence not being executed speedily, will arise from this consideration,—That in our vain calculation of this distant point of retribution, we generally respite it to the day of judgment;—and as that may be a thousand, or ten thousand years off, it proportionably lessens the terror.—To rectify this mistake, we should first consider, that the distance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this distant prospect, not considering that however far off we may fix it in this belief, that in fact it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death.—And how certain that day is, we need not surely be reminded:—’Tis the certainty of the

SERMON XVIII. 109

matter, and of an event which will as
surely come to pass, as that the sun
shall rise to-morrow morning,—that
should enter as much into our calcu-
lations, as if it was hanging over our
heads.—For though, in our fond ima-
ginations, we dream of living many
years upon the earth;—how unex-
pectedly are we summoned from it!
—How oft, in the strength of our
age, in the midst of our projects,—
when we are promising ourselves the
ease of many years!—how oft, at
that very time, and in the height of
this imagination, is the decree sealed,
and the commandment gone forth to
call us into another world!—

This may suffice for the examina-
tion of this one great cause of the

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corruption of the world;—from whence I should proceed, as I purposed, to an inquiry after some other unhappy causes which have a share in this evil.—But I have taken up so much more of your time in this than I first intended,—that I shall defer what I have to say to the next occasion, and put an end to this discourse, by an answer to a question often asked relatively to this argument, in prejudice of Christianity, which cannot be more seasonably answered than in a discourse at this time;—and that is, —Whether the Christian religion has done the world any service in reforming the lives and morals of mankind, —which some who pretend to have considered the present state of vice,

SERMON XVIII. III

seem to doubt of?—This objection I, in some measure, have anticipated in the beginning of this discourse;—and what I have to add to that argument is this,—that as it is impossible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which at so great a distance cannot be brought together and compared,—it must be decided by reason, and the probability of things; upon which issue, one might appeal to the most professed deist, and trust him to determine,—whether the lives of those who are set loose from all obligations,—but those of conveniency,—can be compared with those who have been blest with the extraordinary light of a religion?—and whether so just and holy a religion as the Christian,

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which sets restraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God;—at the same time that it impresses the most awful ones of his majesty and power;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abused, terrible in his judgments;—one constantly about our secret paths,—about our beds:—who spieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is so pure in his nature, that he will punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this inquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deserved.—

If either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be

SERMON XVIII. 113

wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.—

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the christian world,—and the professors of our holy religion may in general be said to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men,—considering what reasons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet still I affirm, if those restraints were lessened,—the world would be infinitely worse ;—and therefore we cannot sufficiently bless and adore the goodness of God, for these advantages brought by the coming of Christ,—which God grant that we may

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live to be more deserving of;—that, in the last day, when he shall come again to judge the world, we may rise to life immortal. Amen.

SERMON XIX.

Trust in God.

PSALM xxxvii. 3.

Put thou thy trust in the Lord.—

WHOEVER seriously reflects upon the state and condition of man, and looks upon that dark side of it, which represents his life as open to so many causes of trouble;—when he sees, how often he eats the bread of affliction, and that he is born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards;—that no rank or degrees of men are exempted from this law of our beings;—but that

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all, from the high cedar of Libanus to the humble shrub upon the wall, are shook in their turns by numberless calamities and distresses:—when one sits down and looks upon this gloomy side of things, with all the sorrowful changes and chances which surround us,—at first sight,—would not one wonder,—how the spirit of a man could bear the infirmities of his nature, and what it is that supports him, as it does, under the many evil accidents which he meets with in his passage through the valley of tears?—Without some certain aid within us to bear us up,—so tender a frame as ours, would be but ill fitted to encounter what generally befalls it in this rugged jour-

SERMON XIX. 117

ney:—and accordingly we find,—that we are so curiously wrought by an all-wise hand, with a view to this,—that in the very composition and texture of our nature, there is a remedy and provision left against most of the evils we suffer;—we being so ordered,—that the principle of self-love given us for preservation, comes in here to our aid,—by opening a door of hope, and in the worst emergencies, flattering us with a belief that we shall extricate ourselves, and live to see better days.—

This expectation,—though in fact it no way alters the nature of the cross accidents to which we lie open, or does at all pervert the course of them,—yet imposes upon the sense

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of them, and like a secret spring in a well-contrived machine, though it cannot prevent, at least it counterbalances the pressure,—and so bears up this tottering, tender frame under many a violent shock and hard jostling, which otherwise would unavoidably overwhelm it.—Without such an inward resource, from an inclination, which is natural to man, to trust and hope for redress in the most deplorable conditions,—his state in this life would be, of all creatures, the most miserable.—When his mind was either wrung with affliction,—or his body lay tortured with the gout or stone,—did he think that in this world there should be no respite to his sorrow;—could he believe the

pains he endured would continue equally intense,—without remedy,—without intermission ;—with what deplorable lamentation would he languish out his day,—and how sweet, as Job says, would the *clods of the valley be to him* ?—But so sad a persuasion, whatever grounds there may be sometimes for it, scarce ever gets full possession of the mind of man, which by nature struggles against despair: so that whatever part of us suffers,—the darkest mind instantly ushers in this relief to it,—points out to hope, encourages to build, though on a sandy foundation, and raises an expectation in us, that things will come to a fortunate issue.—And indeed it is something surprising to

consider the strange force of this passion ;—what wonders it has wrought in supporting men's spirits in all ages, and under such inextricable difficulties, that they have sometimes hoped, as the apostle expresses it, even against hope,—against all likelihood ;—and have looked forwards with comfort under misfortunes, when there has been little or nothing to favour such an expectation.

This flattering propensity in us, which I have here represented, as it is built upon one of the most deceitful of human passions—(that is)—self-love, which at all times inclines us to think better of ourselves, and conditions, than there is ground for ;—how great soever the relief is,

which a man draws from it at present, it too often disappoints in the end, leaving him to go on his way sorrowing,—mourning,—as the prophet says, that his hope is lost.—So that, after all, in our severer trials, we still find a necessity of calling in something to aid this principle, and direct it so, that it may not wander with this uncertain expectation of what may never be accomplished,—but fix itself upon a proper object of trust and reliance, that is able to fulfil our desires, to hear our cry, and to help us.—The passion of hope, without this, though in straits a man may support his spirits for a time with a general expectation of better fortune ;—yet, like a ship tossed

without a pilot upon a troublesome sea,—it may float upon the surface for a while, but is never,—never likely to be brought to the haven where it would be.—To accomplish this, reason and religion are called in at length, and join with nature in exhorting us to hope;—but to hope in God, in whose hands are the issues of life and death,—and without whose knowledge and permission we know that not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground.—Strengthened with this anchor of hope, which keeps us stedfast, when the rains descend, and the floods come upon us,—however the sorrows of a man are multiplied, he bears up his head, looks towards heaven with confi-

SERMON XIX. 123

dence, waiting for the salvation of God:—he then builds upon a rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.—He may be troubled, it is true, on every side, but shall not be distressed,—perplexed, yet not in despair:—though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, even then he fears no evil; this rod and this staff comfort him.

The virtue of this had been sufficiently tried by David, and had, no doubt, been of use to him in the course of a life full of afflictions; many of which were so great, that he declares, that he should verily have fainted under the sense and apprehension of them, but that he believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of

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the living.—He believed!—how could he do otherwise? He had all the conviction that reason and inspiration could give him,—that there was a Being in whom every thing concurred which could be the proper object of trust and confidence;—power to help,—and goodness always to incline him to do it.—He knew this infinite Being, though his dwelling was so high—that his glory was above the heavens,—yet humbled himself to behold the things that are done in heaven and earth:—that he was not an idle and distant spectator of what passed there, but that he was a present help in time of trouble:—that he bowed the heavens and came down to over-rule the course of

SERMON XIX. 125

things; delivering the poor, and him that was in misery, from him that was too strong for him; lifting the simple out of his distress, and guarding him by his providence, so that no man should do him wrong:—that neither the sun should smite him by day, neither the moon by night.—Of this the Psalmist had such evidence from his observation on the life of others, with the strongest conviction, at the same time, which a long life full of personal deliverances could give;—all which taught him the value of the lesson in the text, from which he had received so much encouragement himself,—that he transmits it for the benefit of the whole race of mankind after him, to support them, as it had done him,

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under the afflictions which beset him.

Trust in God;—as if he had said, Whosoever thou art that shall hereafter fall into any such straits or troubles as I have experienced,—learn by my example where to seek for succour;—trust not in princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them:—the sons of men, who are of low degree, are vanity, and are not able to help thee;—men of high degree are a lie,—too often deceive thy hopes, and will not help thee:—but thou, when thy soul is in heaviness,—turn thy eyes from the earth, and look up towards heaven, to that infinitely kind and powerful Being, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; who is

SERMON XIX. 127

a present help in time of trouble:—
despond not, and say within thyself,—
why his chariot wheels stay so long?
and why he vouchsafeth thee not a
speedy relief?—but arm thyself in
thy misfortunes with patience and
fortitude;—trust in God, who sees
all those conflicts under which thou
labourest,—who knows thy necessities
afar off,—and puts all thy tears into
his bottle;—who sees every careful
thought and pensive look,—and hears
every sigh and melancholy groan
thou utterest.—

In all thy exigencies trust and de-
pend on him;—nor ever doubt but
he, who heareth the cry of the father-
less, and defendeth the cause of the
widow, if it is just, will hear thine,

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and either lighten thy burden, and let thee go free;—or, which is the same, if that seems not meet, by adding strength to thy mind, to enable thee to sustain what he has suffered to be laid upon thee.

Whoever recollects the particular psalms said to be composed by this great man, under the several distresses and cross accidents of his life, will perceive the justice of this paraphrase, which is agreeable to the strain of reasoning,—which runs through,—which is little else than a recollection of his own words and thoughts upon those occasions, in all which he appears to have been no less signal in his afflictions, than in his piety, and in that goodness of soul which he

SÉRMON XIX. 129

discovers under them.—I said, the reflections upon his own life and providential escapes, which he had experienced, had had a share in forming these religious sentiments of trust in his mind, which had so early taken root, that when he was going to fight the Philistine,—when he was but a youth and stood before Saul,—he had already learned to argue in this manner:—Let no man's heart fail him;—thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard, and smote him, and slew

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him;—thy fervant flew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them; for the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear,—he will also deliver me out of his hand.—

The conclusion was natural, and the experience which every man has had of God's former loving-kindness and protection to him, either in dangers or distress, does unavoidably engage him to think in the same train.—It is observable that the apostle St. Paul, encouraging the Corinthians to bear with patience the trials incident to human nature, reminds them of the deliverances that God did formerly vouchsafe to him

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and his fellow-labourers, Gaius and Aristarchus;—and on that ground builds a rock of encouragement, for future trust and dependence on him.—His life had been in very great jeopardy at Ephesus,—where he had like to have been brought out to the theatre, to be devoured by wild beasts, and indeed had no human means to avert,—and consequently to escape it;—and therefore, he tells them, that he had this advantage by it, that the more he believed he should be put to death, the more he was engaged by his deliverance, never to depend on any worldly trust, but only on God, who can rescue from the greatest extremity, even from the grave and death

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itself.—For we would not, brethren, says he, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above our strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life ;—but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, and in whom we trust that he will still deliver us.

And indeed a stronger argument cannot be brought for future trust, than the remembrance of past protection ;—for what ground or reason can I have to distrust the kindness

SERMON XIX. 133

of that person, who has always been my friend and benefactor?

On whom can I better rely for assistance in the day of my distress, than on him who stood by me in all mine affliction?—and, when I was at the brink of destruction, delivered me out of all my troubles? Would it not be highly ungrateful, and reflect either upon his goodness or his sufficiency, to distrust that providence which has always had a watchful eye over me?—and who, according to his gracious promises, will never leave me, nor forsake me; and who, in all my wants, in all my emergencies, has been abundantly more willing to give, than I to ask it.—If the former and the latter rain

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have hitherto descended upon the earth in due season, and seed time and harvest have never yet failed ;— why should I fear famine in the land, or doubt, but that he who feedeth the raven, and providently catereth for the sparrow, should likewise be my comfort?—How unlikely is it that ever he should suffer his truth to fail!—This train of reflection, from the consideration of past mercies, is suitable and natural to all mankind ;—there being no one, who by calling to mind God's kindnesses, which have been ever of old, but will see cause to apply the argument to himself.—

And though, in looking back upon the events which have befallen us,

SERMON XIX. 135

we are apt to attribute too much to the arm of flesh, in recounting the more successful parts of them; saying,—My wisdom, my parts, and address, extricated me from this misfortune;—my foresight and penetration saved me from a second;—my courage, and the mightiness of my strength, carried me through a third:—However we are accustomed to talk in this manner,—yet whoever coolly sits down and reflects upon the many accidents (though very improperly called so), which have befallen him in the course of his life,—when he considers the many amazing turns in his favour,—sometimes in the most unpromising cases, and often brought about by the most

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unlikely causes;—when he remembers the particular providences which have gone along with him, the many personal deliverances which have preserved him, the unaccountable manner in which he has been enabled to get through difficulties, which on all sides beset him, on one time of his life, or the strength of mind he found himself endowed with, to encounter afflictions, which fell upon him at another period:—where is the man, I say, who looks back with the least religious sense, upon what has thus happened to him, who could not give you sufficient proofs of God's power, and his arm over him, and recount several cases, wherein the God of Jacob was

SERMON XIX. 137

his help, and the Holy One of Israel his redeemer?

Hast thou ever laid upon the bed of languishing, or laboured under a grievous distemper which threatened thy life? Call to mind thy sorrowful and pensive spirit at that time; and add to it, who it was that had mercy on thee, that brought thee out of darkness and the shadow of death, and made all thy bed in thy sickness.—

Hath the scantiness of thy condition hurried thee into great straits and difficulties, and brought thee almost to distraction?—Consider who it was that spread thy table in that wilderness of thought,—who was it made thy cup to overflow,—who

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added a friend of consolation to thee, and thereby spake peace to thy troubled mind.—Hast thou ever sustained any considerable damage in thy stock or trade?—Bethink thyself who it was that gave thee a serene and contented mind under those losses.—If thou hast recovered,—consider who it was that repaired those breaches,—when thy own skill and endeavours failed: call to mind whose providence has blessed them since,—whose hand it was that has since set a hedge about thee, and made all that thou hast done to prosper.—Hast thou ever been wounded in thy more tender parts, through the loss of an obliging husband?—or hast thou been torn away

SERMON XIX. 139

from the embraces of a dear and promising child, by its unexpected death?—

O consider, whether the God of truth did not approve himself a father to thee, when fatherless,—or a husband to thee, when a widow,—and has either given thee a name better than of sons and daughters, or even beyond thy hope, made thy remaining tender branches to grow up tall and beautiful like the cedars of Libanus.—

Strengthened by these considerations, suggesting the same or like past deliverances, either to thyself,—thy friends or acquaintance,—thou wilt learn this great lesson in the text, in all thy exigencies and dis-

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treffes,—to trust God ; and whatever befalls thee, in the many changes and chances in this mortal life, to speak comfort to thy soul, and to say in the words of Habakkuk the prophet, with which I conclude,—

Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ;—although the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ;—although the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.—

To whom be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XX.

EXODUS, xxi. 14.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile;—thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die.

AS the end and happy result of society, was our mutual protection from the depredations which malice and avarice lay us open to,—so have the laws of God laid proportionable restraints against such violations as would defeat us of such a security.—Of all other attacks which can be made against us,—that of a man's life,—which is his all,—

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being the greatest, the offence, in God's dispensation to the Jews, was denounced as the most heinous,—and represented as most unpardonable.—At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.—Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.—Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer;—he shall surely be put to death.—So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are,—for blood defileth the land;—and the land cannot be cleansed of blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.—For this reason, by the laws of all civilized nations, in all parts of the globe, it has been punished with death.—

SERMON XX. 143

Some civilized and wise communities have so far incorporated these severe dispensations into their municipal laws, as to allow of no distinction betwixt murder and homicide,—at least in the penalty;—leaving the intentions of the several parties concerned in it to that Being who knows the heart, and will adjust the differences of the case hereafter.—This falls, no doubt, heavy upon particulars,—but it is urged for the benefit of the whole.—It is not the business of a preacher to enter into an examination of the grounds and reasons for so seeming a severity.—Where most severe,—they have proceeded, no doubt, from an excess of abhorrence of a

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crime,—which is, of all others, most terrible and shocking in its own nature,—and the most direct attack and stroke at society ;—as the security of a man's life was the first protection of society,—the groundwork of all the other blessings to be desired from such a compact.—Thefts,—oppressions,—exactions, and violences of that kind, cut off the branches ;—this smote the root :—all perished with it ;—the injury irreparable.—No after-act could make amends for it.—What recompence can he give to a man in exchange for his life ?—What satisfaction to the widow,—the fatherless,—to the family,—the friends,—the relations,—cut off from his protection,—and

SERMON XX. 145

render perhaps destitute,—perhaps miserable for ever!—

No wonder, that, by the law of nature,—this crime was always pursued with the most extreme vengeance;—which made the barbarians to judge, when they saw St. Paul upon the point of dying a sudden and terrifying death, —No doubt this man is a murderer; who, though he has escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.—

The censure there was rash and uncharitable;—but the honest detestation of the crime was uppermost.—They saw a dreadful punishment,—they thought;—and in seeing the one,—they suspected the other.—And the vengeance which had overtaken

the holy man, was meant by them the vengeance and punishment of the almighty Being, whose providence and honour was concerned in pursuing him, from the place he had fled from, to that island.

The honour and authority of God is most evidently struck at, most certainly, in every such crime,—and therefore he would pursue it;—it being the reason, in the ninth of Genesis, upon which the prohibition of murder is grounded;—for in the image of God created he man;—as if to attempt the life of a man had something in it peculiarly daring and audacious; not only shocking as to its consequence above

SERMON XX. 147

all other crimes,—but of personal violence and indignity against God, the author of our life and death.—That it is the highest act of injustice to man, and which will admit of no compensation,—I have said.—But the depriving a man of life, does not comprehend the whole of his suffering; he may be cut off in an unprovided or disordered condition, with regard to the great account betwixt himself and his Maker.—He may be under the power of irregular passions and desires.—The best of men are not always upon their guard.—And I am sure we have all reason to join in that affecting part of our Litany,—That amongst other evils,—God would deliver us from

sudden death :—that we may have some foresight of that period to compose our spirits,—prepare our accounts,—and put ourselves in the best posture we can to meet it ; for, after we are most prepared,—it is a terror to human nature.—

The people of some nations are said to have a peculiar art in poisoning by slow and gradual advances.— In this case,—however horrid,—it favours of mercy with regard to our spiritual state ;—for the sensible decays of nature, which a sufferer must feel within him from the secret workings of the horrid drug,—give warning, and shew that mercy which the bloody hand that comes upon his neighbour suddenly, and slays him

SERMON XX. 149

with guile,—has denied him.—It may serve to admonish him of the duty of repentance, and to make his peace with God, whilst he had time and opportunity.—The speedy execution of justice, which, as our laws now stand, and which were intended for that end,—must strike the greater terror upon that account—Short as the interval between sentence and death is,—it is long, compared to the case of the murdered.—Thou allowedst the man no time, said the judge to a late criminal, in a most affecting manner;—thou allowedst him not a moment to prepare for eternity;—and to one who thinks at all,—it is, of all reflections and self-accusation, the most heavy and un-

furmountable.—That by the hand of violence, a man in a perfect state of health,—whilst he walks out in perfect security, as he thinks, with his friends;—perhaps whilst he is sleeping soundly,—to be hurried out of the world by the affassin,—by a sudden stroke,—to find himself at the bar of God's justice, without notice and preparation for his trial,—'tis most horrible!—

Though he be really a good man, (and it is to be hoped God makes merciful allowances in such cases)—yet it is a terrifying consideration at the best;—and as the injury is greater,—there are also very aggravating circumstances relating to the person who commits this act.—As

SERMON XX. 151

when it is the effect not of a rash and sudden passion, which sometimes disorders and confounds reason for a moment,—but of a deliberate and propense design or malice.—When the sun not only goes down but rises upon his wrath;—when he sleeps not—till he has struck the stroke;—when, after he has had time and leisure to recollect himself,—and consider what he is going to do;—when, after all the checks of conscience,—the struggles of humanity,—the recoilings of his own blood, at the thoughts of shedding another man's,—he shall persist still,—and resolve to do it.—Merciful God! protect us—from doing or suffering such evils.—Blessed be thy name and pro-

vidence, which seldom or ever suffers it to escape with impunity.—In vain does the guilty flatter himself with hopes of secrecy or impunity:—the eye of God is always upon him,—Whither can he fly from his presence!—By the immensity of his nature, he is present in all places;—by the infinity of it, to all times;—by his omniscience, to all thoughts, words, and actions of men.—By an emphatical phrase in Scripture, the blood of the innocent is said to cry to heaven from the ground for vengeance;—and it was for this reason, that he might be brought to justice,—that he was debarred the benefit of any asylum and the cities of refuge:—For the elders of his city

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shall fend and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood,—and that their eye should not pity him.

The text says,—Thou shalt take him from my altar that he may die.— It had been a very ancient imagination, that for men guilty of this and other horrid crimes,—a place held sacred, as dedicated to God, was a refuge and protection to them from the hands of justice.—The law of God cuts the transgressor off from all delusive hopes of this kind;—and I think the Romish church has very little to boast of in the sanctuaries which she leaves open, for this and other crimes and irregularities.— Sanctuaries which are often the first

temptations to wickedness, and therefore bring the greater scandal and dishonour to her that authorises their pretensions.—

Every obstruction of the course of justice,—is a door opened to betray society, and bereave us of those blessings which it has in view.—To stand up for the privileges of such places, is to invite men to sin with a bribe of impunity.—It is a strange way of doing honour to God, to screen actions which are a disgrace to humanity.—

What Scripture and all civilized nations teach concerning the crime of taking away another man's life,—is applicable to the wickedness of a man's attempting to bereave himself of his own.—He has no more right

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over it,—than over that of others:—
and whatever false glosses have been
put upon it by men of bad heads or
bad hearts,—it is at the bottom a
complication of cowardice and wicked-
ness, and weakness;—is one of
the fataleſt miſtakes, deſperation can
hurry a man into;—inconſiſtent with
all the reaſoning and religion of the
world, and irreconcilable with that
patience under afflictions,—that re-
ſignation and ſubmiſſion to the will of
God in all ſtraits, which is required
of us.—But if our calamities are
brought upon ourſelves by a man's
own wickedneſs,—ſtill has he leſs to
urge,—leaſt reaſon has he to re-
nounce the protection of God—when

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he most stands in need of it, and of his mercy.—

But as I intend the subject of self-murder for my discourse next Sunday,—I shall not anticipate what I have to say,—but proceed to consider some other cases, in which the law relating to the life of our neighbour is transgressed in different degrees.—All which are generally spoken of under the subject of murder,—and considered by the best casuists as a species of the same,—and in justice to the subject cannot be passed here.—

St. John says, Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer;—it is the first step to this sin;—and our Savi-

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our, in his sermon upon the Mount, has explained in how many sly and unsuspected ways and degrees,—the command in the law, Thou shalt do no murder, may be opposed, if not broken.—All real mischiefs and injuries maliciously brought upon a man, to the sorrow and disturbance of his mind,—eating out the comfort of his life, and shortening his days,—are this sin in disguise;—and the grounds of the Scripture expressing it with such severity, is,—that the beginnings of wrath and malice,—in event, often extend to such great and unforeseen effects, as, were we foretold them,—we should give so little credit to, as to say,—Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this

thing?—And though these beginnings do not necessarily produce the worst (God forbid they should), yet they cannot be committed without these evil seeds are first sown:—As Cain's causeless anger (as Dr. Clarke observes) against his brother,—to which the apostle alludes,—ended in taking away his life;—and the best instructors teach us, that, to avoid a sin,—we must avoid the steps and temptations which lead to it.—

This should warn us to free our minds from all tincture of avarice, and desire after what is another man's—It operates the same way,—and has terminated too oft in the same crime.—And it is the great excellency of the Christian religion,—

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that it has an eye to this in the stress laid upon the first springs of evils in the heart ;—rendering us accountable not only for our words,—but the thoughts themselves,—if not checked in time, but suffered to proceed further than the first motions of concupiscence.

Ye have heard, therefore, says our Saviour, that it was said by them of old time,—Thou shalt not kill;—but I say unto you,—whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment :—and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,—shall be in danger of the council ;—but whosoever shall say, “ thou fool,”—shall be in danger of hell-fire.—The interpretation of which I

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shall give you in the words of a great scripturist, Dr. Clarke,—and is as follows:—That the three gradations of crimes are an allusion to the three different degrees of punishment, in the three courts of judicature amongst the Jews.—And our Saviour's meaning was,—That every degree of sin, from its first conception to its outrage,—every degree of malice and hatred, shall receive from God a punishment proportionable to the offence.—Whereas the old law, according to the Jewish interpretation, extended not to these things at all,—forbade only murder and outward injuries.—Whosoever shall say, “thou fool,” shall be in danger of hell-fire.—The sense of which is not that,

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in the strict and literal acceptation, every rash and passionate expression shall be punished with eternal damnation;—(for who then would be saved?)—but that at the exact account in the judgment of the great day, every secret thought and intent of the heart shall have its just estimation and weight in the degrees of punishment, which shall be assigned to every one in his final state.

There is another species of this crime which is seldom taken notice of in discourses upon the subject,—and yet can be reduced to no other class:—And that is, where the life of our neighbour is shortened,—and often taken away as directly as by a weapon, by the empirical sale of no-

strums and quack medicines,—which ignorance and avarice blend.—The loud tongue of ignorance impudently promises much,—and the ear of the sick is open.—And as many of these pretenders deal in edge-tools, too many, I fear, perish with the misapplication of them.—

So great are the difficulties of tracing out the hidden causes of the evils to which this frame of ours is subject,—that the most candid of the profession have ever allowed and lamented how unavoidably they are in the dark.—So that the best medicines, administered with the wisest heads,—shall often do the mischief they were intended to prevent.—These are misfortunes to which we

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are subject in this state of darkness ;
 —but when men without skill,—
 without education,—without know-
 ledge either of the distemper, or even
 of what they sell,—make merchan-
 dize of the miserable,—and from a
 dishonest principle—trifle with the
 pains of the unfortunate,—too often
 with their lives,—and from the mere
 motive of a dishonest gain,—every
 such instance of a person bereft of
 life by the hand of ignorance, can
 be considered in no other light than
 a branch of the same root.—It is
 murder in the true sense ;—which,
 though not cognizable by our laws,—
 by the laws of right, every man's own
 mind and conscience, must appear
 equally black and detestable.—

In doing what is wrong,—we stand chargeable with all the bad consequences which arise from the action, whether foreseen or not.—And as the principal view of the empiric in those cases is not what he always pretends,—the good of the public,—but the good of himself,—it makes the action what it is.—

Under this head it may not be improper to comprehend all adulterations of medicines, wilfully made worse through avarice.—If a life is lost by such wilful adulterations,—and it may be affirmed, that in many critical turns of an acute distemper, there is but a single cast left for the patient,—the trial and chance of a single drug in his behalf;—and if

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that has wilfully been adulterated and
wilfully despoiled of its best virtues,
—what will the vender answer?—

May GOD grant we may all answer
well for ourselves, that we may be
finally happy. Amen.

that has rightly been observed and
wisely reported of its virtues
— what will the reader answer?
May God grant we may all answer
well for ourselves, that we may be
truly happy. Amen.

SERMON XXI.

Sanctity of the Apostles.

MATTHEW, xi. 6.

*Blessed is he that shall not be offended
in me.*

THE general prejudices of the Jewish nation concerning the royal state and condition of the Saviour, who was to come into the world,—was a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to the greatest part of that unhappy and preposessed people, when the promise was actually fulfilled.—Whether it was altogether the traditions of their

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fathers,—or that the rapturous expressions of the prophets, which represented the Messiah's spiritual kingdom in such extent of power and dominion, misled them into it;—or that their own carnal expectations turned wilful interpreters upon them, inclining them to look for nothing but the wealth and worldly grandeur which were to be acquired under their deliverer;—whether these,—or that the system of temporal blessings helped to cherish them in this gross and covetous expectation,—it was one of the great causes for their rejecting him.—“ This fellow, we know not whence he is,”—was the popular cry of one part;—and they who seemed to know whence he was,

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scornfully turned it against him, by the repeated quere,—Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Judah and Simon?—and are not his sisters here with us?—And they were offended at him,—So that, though it was prepared by God to be the glory of his people Israel, yet the circumstances of humility, in which he was manifested, were thought a scandal to them.—Strange!—that he who was born their king,—should be born of no other virgin than Mary,—the meanest of their people; —(for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden)—and of one of the poorest too:—for she had not a lamb to offer,—but was purified,

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as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle-dove;—that the Saviour of their nation, whom they expected to be ushered amidst them with all the ensigns and apparatus of royalty, should be brought forth in a stable, and answerable to distress;—subjected all his life to the lowest conditions of humanity:—that whilst he lived, he should not have a hole to put his head in, nor his corpse in, when he died;—but his grave too, must be the gift of charity.—These were thwarting considerations to those who waited for the redemption of Israel, and looked for it in no other shape, than the accomplishment of those golden dreams of temporal power and sovereignty,

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which had filled their imaginations.—

The ideas were not to be reconciled;—and so insuperable an obstacle was the prejudice on one side, to their belief on the other,—that it literally fell out, as Simeon prophetically declared of the Messiah,—that he was set forth for the *fall*, as well as the rising again, of many in Israel.

This, though it was the cause of their infidelity,—was however no excuse for it.—For whatever their mistakes were, the miracles which were wrought in contradiction to them, brought conviction enough to leave them without excuse;—and besides, it was natural for them to have concluded, had their prepossessions given

them leave,—that he who fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, could not want power to be great;—and therefore needed not to appear in the condition of poverty and meanness, had it not, on other scores, been more needful to confront the pride and vanity of the world,—and to shew his followers what the temper of christianity was, by the temper of its first institutor;—who, though they were offered, and he could have commanded them,—despised the glories of the world;—took upon him the form of a servant;—and though equal with God,—yet made himself of no reputation,—that he might settle, and be the example of so holy and humble a reli-

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gion, and thereby convince his disciples for ever, that neither his kingdom nor their happiness were to be of this world.—Thus the Jews might have easily argued;—but when there was nothing but reason to do it with on one side, and strong prejudices, backed with interest, to maintain the dispute, upon the other,—we do not find the point is always so easily determined.—Although the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the mighty works he wrought in its support, were demonstratively stronger arguments for his divinity, than the unrespected lowliness of his condition could be against it;—yet the prejudice continued strong;—they had been accustomed to temporal

promises;—so bribed to do their duty,—they could not endure to think of a religion that would not promise, as much as Moses did, to fill their basket, and to set them high above all nations:—a religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin and meagre;—and whose principles and promises,—like the curses of their law,—called for sufferings, and promised persecutions.

If we take this key along with us through the New Testament, it will let us into the spirit and meaning of many of our Saviour's replies in his conferences with his disciples, and others of the Jews;—so particularly in this place, Matthew vi. when

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John had sent two of his disciples to inquire, Whether it was he that should come, or that they were to look for another?—Our Saviour, with a particular eye to this prejudice, and the general scandal he knew had risen against his religion upon this worldly account,—after a recital to the messengers of the many miracles he had wrought; as that—the blind received their sight,—the lame walked,—the lepers were cleansed,—the dead raised;—all which characters, with their benevolent ends, fully demonstrated him to be the Messiah that was promised them;—he closes up his answer to them with the words of the text,—And blessed is he that shall not be offended in me;

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—bleſſed is the man whoſe upright and honeſt heart will not be blinded by worldly conſiderations, or hearken to his luſts and prepoſſeſſions in a truth of this moment.—The like benediction is recorded in the 7th chapter of St. Luke, and in the 6th of St. John ;—when Peter broke out in that warm confeſſion of their belief—Lord, we believe,—we are ſure that thou art Chriſt the Son of the living GGD.—The ſame benediction is uttered,—though couched in different words,—Bleſſed art thou, Simon Bar-jona ;—for fleſh and blood has not revealed it, but my Father which is in heaven.—Fleſh and blood, the natural workings of this carnal de-fire ;—the luſt and love of the world

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have had no hand in this conviction of thine; but my father, and the works which I have wrought in his name,—in vindication of this faith—have established thee in it, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.—

This universal ruling principle and almost invincible attachment to the interests and glories of the world, which we see first made so powerful a stand against the belief of christianity,—has continued to have as ill an effect, at least, upon the practice of it ever since;—and therefore, there is no one point of wisdom, that is of nearer importance to us,—than to purify this gross appetite, and restrain it within bounds, by lowering

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our high conceit of the things of this life, and our concern for those advantages which misled the Jews.—To judge justly of the world,—we must stand at a due distance from it;—which will discover to us the vanity of its riches and honours, in such true dimensions, as will engage us to behave ourselves towards them with moderation.—This is all that is wanting to make us wise and good;—that we may be left to the full influence of religion;—to which christianity so far conduces, that it is the great blessing, the peculiar advantage we enjoy under its institution,—that it affords us not only the most excellent precepts of this kind, but also it shews us those precepts

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confirmed by most excellent examples.—A heathen philosopher may talk very elegantly about despising the world, and, like Seneca, may prescribe very ingenious rules to teach us an art he never exercised himself : —for all the while he was writing in praise of poverty, he was enjoying a great estate, and endeavouring to make it greater.—But if ever we hope to reduce those rules to practice, it must be by the help of religion.—If we would find men who by their lives bore witness to their doctrines, we must look for them amongst the acts and monuments of our church,—amongst the first followers of their crucified Master ; who spoke with authority, because they

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spoke experimentally, and took care to make their words good,—by despising the world, and voluntarily accounting all things in it loss, that they might win Christ.—O holy and blessed apostles!—blessed were ye indeed,—for ye conferred not with flesh and blood,—for ye were not offended in him through any considerations of this world;—ye conferred not with flesh and blood, neither with its snares and temptations.—Neither the pleasures of life, or the pains of death laid hold upon your faith to make you fall from him—Ye had your prejudices of worldly grandeur in common with the rest of your nation;—saw, like them, your expectations blasted;—

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but ye gave them up, as men governed by reason and truth.—As ye surrendered all your hopes in this world to your faith, with fortitude,—so did ye meet the terrors of the world with the same temper.—Neither the frowns and discountenance of the civil powers,—neither tribulation, or distress, or persecution,—or cold,—or nakedness,—or famine,—or the sword, could separate you from the love of Christ.—Ye took up your crosses cheerfully, and followed him;—followed the same rugged way—trod the wine-press after him;—voluntarily submitting yourselves to poverty,—to punishment,—to the scorn and the reproaches of the world, which ye knew were to be

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the portion of all of you who engaged in preaching a mystery so spoken against by the world;—so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures,—and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason.—So that ye were, as one of ye expressed, and all of ye experimentally found, though ye were made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things, upon this account;—yet ye went on as zealously as ye set out.—Ye were not offended, nor ashamed of the gospel of Christ;—wherefore should ye?—The impostor and hypocrite might have been ashamed;—the guilty would have found cause for it;—ye had no cause,—though ye had temptation.—Ye preached

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but what ye knew, and your honest and upright hearts gave evidence,—the strongest,—to the truth of it;—for ye left all,—ye suffered all,—ye gave all that your sincerity had left you to give.—Ye gave your lives at last as pledges and confirmations of your faith and warmest affection for your Lord.—Holy and blessed men! —ye gave all,—when, alas! our cold and frozen affection will part with nothing for his sake, not even with our vices and follies, which are worse than nothing,—for they are vanity, and misery, and death.—

The state of christianity calls not now for such evidences, as the apostles gave of their attachment to it.—We have, literally speaking,

neither houses nor lands, nor possessions to forsake;—we have neither wives or children, or brethren or sisters, to be torn from;—no rational pleasure—or natural endearments to give up.—We have nothing to part with, —but what is not our interest to keep,—our lusts and passions.—We have nothing to do for Christ's sake—but what is most for our own;—that is,—to be temperate, and chaste, and just,—and peaceable, — and charitable, — and kind to one another.—So that if man could suppose himself in a capacity even of capitulating with God, concerning the terms upon which he would submit to his government;—and to chuse the laws he would be

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bound to observe in testimony of his faith ;—it were impossible for him to make any proposals which, upon all accounts, should be more advantageous to his interests—than those very conditions to which we are already obliged ; that is, to deny ourselves ungodliness, to live soberly and righteously in this present life, and lay such restraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature,—the improvement of our happiness,—our health,—our peace,—our reputation and safety.—When one considers this representation of the temporal inducements of christianity,—and compares it with the difficulties and discouragements which they encountered who

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first made profession of a persecuted and hated religion;—at the same time that it raises the idea of the fortitude and sanctity of these holy men, of whom the world is not worthy,—it sadly diminishes that of ourselves,—which, though it has all the blessings of this life apparently on its side to support it,—yet can scarce be kept alive;—and if we may form a judgment from the little stock of religion which is left,—should God ever exact the same trials,—unless we greatly alter for the better,—or there should prove some secret charm in persecution, which we know not of,—it is much to be doubted, if the Son of Man should make this proof,—of this generation,—whether there

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would be found faith upon the earth.

As this argument may convince us,—so let it shame us into virtue,—that the admirable examples of those holy men may not be left us or commemorated by us to no end;—but rather that they may answer the pious purpose of their institution,—to conform our lives to theirs,—that with them we may be partakers of a glorious inheritance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XXII.

Penances.

I JOHN, v. 3.

*And his commandments are not
grievous.*

NO,—they are not grievous, my dear auditors.—Amongst the many prejudices which at one time or other have been conceived against our holy religion, there is scarce any one which has done more dishonour to christianity, or which has been more opposite to the spirit of the gospel, than this, in express contradiction to the words of the text.

“ That the commandments of God *are* grievous.”—That the way which leads to life is not only strait, for that our Saviour tells us, and that with much tribulation we shall seek it;—but that christians are bound to make the worst of it, and tread it barefoot upon thorns and briers,—if ever they expect to arrive happily at their journey’s end.—And in course, —during this disastrous pilgrimage, it is our duty so to renounce the world, and abstract ourselves from it, as neither to interfere with its interests, or taste any of the pleasures, or any of the enjoyments of this life.—

Nor has this been confined merely to speculation, but has frequently

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been extended to practice, as is plain, not only from the lives of many legendary saints and hermits, —whose chief commendation seems to have been, “ That they fled unnaturally from all commerce with their fellow-creatures, and then mortified, and piously—half starved themselves to death ;”—but likewise from the many austere and fantastic orders which we see in the Romish church, which have all owed their origin and establishment to the same idle and extravagant opinion.

Nor is it to be doubted, but the affectation of something like it in our Methodists, when they descant upon the necessity of alienating themselves from ‘the world, and selling

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all that they have,—is not to be ascribed to the same mistaken enthusiastic principle, which would cast so black a shade upon religion, as if the kind Author of it had created us on purpose to go mourning, all our lives long, in sack-cloth and ashes,—and sent us into the world, as so many faint-errants, in quest of adventures full of sorrow and affliction.

Strange force of enthusiasm!—and yet not altogether unaccountable.—For what opinion was there ever so odd, or action so extravagant, which has not, at one time or other, been produced by ignorance, —conceit, —melancholy; — a mixture of devotion, with an ill con-

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currence of air and diet, operating together in the same person.—When the minds of men happen to be thus unfortunately prepared, whatever groundless doctrine rises up, and settles itself strongly upon their fancies, has generally the ill-luck to be interpreted as an illumination from the spirit of God;—and whatever strange action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do,—that impulse is concluded to be a call from heaven; and consequently,—that they cannot err in executing it.—

If this, or some such account, was not to be admitted, how is it possible to be conceived that christianity, which breathed out nothing but peace and comfort to mankind, which profes-

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edly took off the severities of the Jewish law, and was given us in the spirit of meekness, to ease our shoulders of a burden which was too heavy for us;—that this religion, so kindly calculated for the ease and tranquillity of man, and which enjoins nothing but what is suitable to his nature, should be so misunderstood;—or that it should ever be supposed,—that he who is infinitely happy, could envy us our enjoyments;—or that a Being infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful passenger a little rest and refreshment, to support his spirits through a weary pilgrimage;—or that he should call him to an account hereafter, because, in his way, he had hastily

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snatched at some fugacious and innocent pleasures, till he was suffered to take up his final repose.—This is no improbable account, and the many invitations we find in Scripture to a grateful enjoyment of the blessings and advantages of life, make it evident.—The apostle tells us in the text,—That GOD's commandments are not grievous.—He has pleasure in the prosperity of his people, and wills not that they should turn tyrants and executioners upon their minds or bodies, and inflict pains and penalties on them to no end or purpose :—That he has proposed peace and plenty, joy and victory, as the encouragement and portion of his servants; thereby instructing us,—

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that our virtue is not necessarily endangered by the fruition of outward things;—but that temporal blessings and advantages, instead of extinguishing, more naturally kindle our love and gratitude to God, before whom it is no way inconsistent both to worship and rejoice.

If this was not so, why, you'll say, does God seem to have made such provision for our happiness?—Why has he given us so many powers and faculties for enjoyment, and adapted so many objects to gratify and entertain them?—Some of which he has created so fair,—with such wonderful beauty, and has formed them so exquisitely for this end,—that they have power, for a time, to

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charm away the sense of pain,—to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and sickness, and make it go and remember its miseries no more.—Can all this, you'll say, be reconciled to God's wisdom, which does nothing in vain;—or can it be accounted for on any other supposition, but that the Author of our being, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, wills us a comfortable existence even *here*, and seems moreover so evidently to have ordered things with a view to this, that the ways which lead to our future happiness, when rightly understood, he has made to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace?

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From this representation of things we are led to this demonstrative truth, then, that God never intended to debar man of pleasure, under certain limitations.

Travellers on a business of the last and most important concern, may be allowed to please their eyes with the natural and artificial beauties of the country they are passing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand they were sent upon; —and if they are not led out of their road by variety of prospects, edifices and ruins, would it not be a senseless piece of severity to shut their eyes against such gratifications?—*For who has required such service at their hands?*

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The humouring of certain appetites, where morality is not concerned, seems to be the means by which the Author of nature intended to sweeten this journey of life,—and bear us up under the many shocks and hard jostlings, which we are sure to meet with in our way.—And a man might, with as much reason, muffle up himself against sun-shine and fair weather,—and at other times expose himself naked to the inclemencies of cold and rain, as debar himself of the innocent delights of his nature, for affected reserve and melancholy.

It is true, on the other hand, our passions are apt to grow upon us by indulgence, and become exorbitant,

if they are not kept under exact discipline, that by way of caution and prevention, 'twere better, at certain times, to affect some degree of needless reserve, than hazard any ill consequences from the other extreme.

But when almost the whole of religion is made to consist in the pious fooleries of penances and sufferings, as is practised in the church of Rome (did no other evil attend it), yet, since it is putting religion upon a wrong scent, placing it more in these than in inward purity and integrity of heart, one cannot guard too much against this, as well as all other such abuses of religion, as make it to consist in something which it ought not.—How such mockery

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became a part of religion at first, or upon what motives they were imagined to be services acceptable to God, is hard to give a better account of than what was hinted above; namely,—that men of melancholy and morose tempers, conceiving the Deity to be like themselves, a gloomy, discontented and sorrowful being,—believed he delighted, as they did, in splenetic and mortifying actions, and therefore made their religious worship to consist of chimeras as wild and barbarous as their own dreams and vapours.

What ignorance and enthusiasm at first introduced,—now tyranny and imposture continue to support.—So that the political improvement of

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these delusions to the purposes of wealth and power, is made one of the strongest pillars which upholds the Romish religion;—which, with all its pretences to a more strict mortification and sanctity,—when you examine it minutely, is little else than a mere pecuniary contrivance.—And the truest definition you can give of popery—is,—that it is a system put together and contrived to operate upon men's weaknesses and passions,—and thereby to pick their pockets,—and leave them in a fit condition for its arbitrary designs.

And indeed that church has not been wanting in gratitude for the good offices of this kind, which the doctrine of penances has done them;

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for, in consideration of its services,—they have raised it above the level of moral duties,—and have at length complimented it into the number of their sacraments, and made it a necessary point to salvation.

By these, and other tenets, no less politic and inquisitorial,—popery has found out the art of making men miserable in spite of their senses, and the plenty with which God has blessed them.

So that in many countries where popery reigns,—but especially in that part of Italy where she has raised her throne,—though, by the happiness of its soil and climate, it is capable of producing as great variety and abundance as any country upon earth;—

yet so successful have its spiritual directors been in the management and retail of these blessings, that they have found means to allay, if not entirely to defeat, them all, by one pretence or other.—Some bitterness is officiously squeezed into every man's cup for his soul's health, till, at length, the whole intention of nature and providence is destroyed.—It is not surprising, that where such unnatural severities are practised and heightened by other hardships,—the most fruitful land should be barren, and wear a face of poverty and desolation ;—or that many thousands, as have been observed, should fly from the rigours of such a government, and seek shelter rather

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amongst rocks and deserts, than lie at the mercy of so many unreasonable task-masters, under whom they can hope for no other reward of their industry,—but rigorous slavery, made still worse by the tortures of unnecessary mortifications.—*I say unnecessary*,—because where there is a virtuous and good end proposed from any sober instances of self-denial and mortification,—God forbid we should call them unnecessary, or that we should dispute against a thing—from the abuse to which it has been put;—and, therefore, what is said in general upon this head, will be understood to reach no farther than where the practice is become a mixture of fraud and tyranny, but will no ways be interpreted to extend to those

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self-denials which the discipline of our holy church directs at this solemn season; which have been introduced by reason and good sense at first, and have since been applied to serve no purposes,—but those of religion:—these, by restraining our appetites for a while, and withdrawing our thoughts from grosser objects,—do, by a mechanical effect, dispose us for cool and sober reflections, incline us to turn our eyes inwards upon ourselves, and consider what we are,—and what we have been doing;—for what intent we were sent into the world, and what kind of characters we were designed to act in it.

It is necessary that the mind of man, at some certain periods, should be prepared to enter into this ac-

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count; and without some such discipline, to check the insolence of unrestrained appetites, and call home the conscience,—the soul of man, capable as it is of brightness and perfection, would sink down to the lowest depths of darkness and brutality.—However true this is,—there still appears no obligation to renounce the innocent delights of our beings, or to affect a sullen distaste against them.—Nor, in truth,—can even the supposition of it be well admitted:—for pleasures arising from the free and natural exercise of the faculties of the mind and body, to talk them down, is like talking against the frame and mechanism of human nature, and would be no less sense-

less than the disputing against the burning of fire, or falling downwards of a stone.—Besides this,—man is so contrived, that he stands in need of frequent repairs;—both mind and body are apt to sink and grow unactive under long and close attention; and, therefore, must be restored by proper recruits.—Some part of our time may doubtless innocently and lawfully be employed in actions merely diverting;—and whenever such indulgencies become criminal, it is seldom the nature of the actions themselves,—but the excess which makes them so.

But some one may here ask,—By what rule are we to judge of excess in these cases?—If the enjoyment of

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the same sort of pleasures may be either innocent or guilty, according to the use or abuse of them,—how shall we be certified where the boundaries lie?—or be speculative enough to know how far we may go with safety?—I answer, there are very few who are not casuists enough to make a right judgment in this point.—For since one principal reason, why God may be supposed to allow pleasure in this world, seems to be for the refreshment and recruit of our souls and bodies, which, like clocks, must be wound up at certain intervals,—every man understands so much of the frame and mechanism of himself, to know how and when to unbend himself with such relaxations

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as are necessary to regain his natural vigour and cheerfulness, without which it is impossible he should either be in a disposition or capacity to discharge the several duties of his life.—Here then the partition becomes visible.

Whenever we pay this tribute to our appetites, any further than is sufficient for the purposes for which it was first granted,—the action proportionably loses some share of its innocence.—The surplussage of what is unnecessarily spent on such occasions, is so much of the little portion of our time negligently squandered, which, in prudence, we should apply better ; because it was allotted us for more important uses, and a different

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account will be required of it at our hands hereafter.

For this reason, does it not evidently follow,—that many actions and pursuits, which are irreproachable in their own natures, may be rendered blameable and vicious, from this single consideration, “ That they have made us wasteful of the moments of this short and uncertain fragment of life, which should be almost one of our last prodigalities, since of them all, the least retrievable.”—Yet how often is diversion, instead of amusement and relaxation, made the art and business of life itself?—Look round,—what policy and contrivance is every day put in practice, for pre-engaging every day

in the week, and parcelling out every hour of the day for one idleness or another,—for doing nothing,—or something worse than nothing ;—and that with so much ingenuity, as scarce to leave a minute upon their hands to reproach them.—Though we all complain of the shortness of life,—yet how many people seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city for guests to come and take it off their hands.—If some of the more distressful objects of this kind were to sit down and write a bill of their time, though partial as that of the unjust steward,—when they found in reality that the whole sum of it,

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for many years, amounted to little more than this,—that they had rose up to eat,—to drink,—to play,—and had laid down again, merely because they were fit for nothing else:—when they looked back and beheld this fair space, capable of such heavenly improvements,—all scrawled over and defaced with a succession of so many unmeaning cyphers,—good GOD!—how would they be ashamed and confounded at the account!

With what reflections will they be able to support themselves in the decline of a life so miserably cast away,—should it happen, as it sometimes does,—that they have stood idle even unto the eleventh hour.—We

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have not always power, and are not always in a temper, to impose upon ourselves.—When the edge of appetite is worn down, and the spirits of youthful days are cooled, which hurried us on in a circle of pleasure and impertinence,—then reason and reflection will have the weight which they deserve;—afflictions, or the bed of sickness, will supply the place of conscience;—and if they should fail,—old age will overtake us at last,—and shew us the past pursuits of life,—and force us to look upon them in their true point of view.—If there is any thing more to cast a cloud upon so melancholy a prospect as this shews us,—it is surely, the difficulty and hazard of having

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all the work of the day to perform in the last hour;—of making an atonement to God, when we have no sacrifice to offer him, but the dregs and infirmities of those days, when we could have no pleasure in them.

How far God may be pleased to accept such late and imperfect services, are beyond the intention of this discourse.—Whatever stresses some may lay upon it,—a death-bed repentance is but a weak and slender plank to trust our all upon.—Such as it is;—to that, and God's infinite mercies, we commit them, who will not employ that time and opportunity he has given to provide a better security.

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That we may all make a right use of the time allotted us,—God grant through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

END OF THE FIFTH VOLUME.

